

1.94  
A1422R

REPORTING TO THE CONSUMER

An interview between Don Montgomery, Consumers' Counsel, A.A.A., and Morse Salisbury, Chief of Radio Service, broadcast Tuesday, March 2, 1937, in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour, by 57 stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company.

####

SALISBURY:

It's been some time since we've had a report from the Consumers' Counsel of the AAA. So today I'm glad to present to you the head of the Consumers' Counsel division, Mr. Don Montgomery.

MONTGOMERY:

I'm happy to say good afternoon to Morse Salisbury's friends in the Farm and Home Hour audience.

SALISBURY:

And in return for your courtesy, I'm going to fire questions at you.

MONTGOMERY:

All right, Morse, shoot.....

SALISBURY:

Well, first, I'll ask you to describe the functions of the Consumers' Counsel. As I understand it, your division has a two fold responsibility. It works closely with the Administration on new farm legislation, studying the probable effect on the consumer of steps taken under that legislation. In this capacity its primary interest is the achievement and maintenance of an adequate supply of agricultural products.

MONTGOMERY:

That's correct.

SALISBURY:

Good. Now we come to the second function of the Consumers' Counsel and the one -- the "Home" end of the Farm and Home audience will be particularly interested in. That is the work you do directly for the consumer.

MONTGOMERY:

You are undoubtedly thinking of our bimonthly magazine, the CONSUMERS' GUIDE.

SALISBURY:

For one thing, Yes. I understand that the CONSUMERS' GUIDE which started a few years ago as a mimeograph release is now a printed magazine with almost a 100,000 circulation. That's rapid growth. How do you account for it?

MONTGOMERY:

We, of the Consumers' Counsel, think it is because the magazine is filling a very important consumer need. The Department of Agriculture is composed of a vast number of agencies. Regulatory agencies are policing trade and commerce under laws written to prevent abuses or are furnishing services



MONTGOMERY: (Continued)

to improve the methods of distribution and the quality of products. Scientists are engaged in research. What is being done by these specialists is of great interest to the consumer, but scientific specialists do not specialize in telling plain people like consumers what it's all about. That is our job. Through the CONSUMERS' GUIDE, we are specializing in helping all kinds of people to understand the things which experts find out and what they mean.

SALISBURY:

In other words you are the consumers' interpreter in the AAA. You show him his way around in print.

MONTGOMERY:

That's a neat way of putting it, Morse. I'll have to remember that. In our stories in the CONSUMERS' GUIDE we keep constantly in mind that the consumers are primarily interested in quality, quantity, and price of commodities. We attempt to assist them by publishing facts that will help them to buy economically and wisely.

SALISBURY:

There must be a tremendous need for such material.

MONTGOMERY:

There is - both for individuals and groups. Consumer organizations are springing up like mushrooms throughout the country. Many of the groups to make their individual dollars go further are buying collectively in large quantities. To aid these consumer groups we have recently started a new service. Twice a month we issue a bulletin called the CONSUMERS' MARKET SERVICE. It is primarily intended for buyers of consumer organizations which purchase on a large scale. It carries up to the minute data on what is happening to supplies and what is likely to happen to the market.

SALISBURY:

Your office has undertaken quite a job if it is trying to keep consumer organizations supplied with information.

MONTGOMERY:

Oh we're not doing the job alone. That would be impossible. There are many agencies in the Government such as the Bureau of Home Economics in our own Department, the Consumers' Project in the Department of Labor which are constantly working on projects related to the consumer. But consumers are not relying on Government agencies alone to help them. They are busy helping themselves. Clubs and organizations all over the country are tackling such problems as quality standards and fair prices for commodities. Principles of consumer buying are taught today as part of home economic courses by nearly 12,000 teachers. In nearly 2,000 schools it is a major subject. In fact, Mr. Salisbury, one of our problems as a consumer agency is keeping up with all this activity and in guiding consumers to new materials which may be useful to them. Recently we published a bulletin listing sources of information in the Government for Consumer education and Organization. A pamphlet which we published a short time ago on the sources of information regarding co-operatives no longer adequately covers the field. At the present time we and the Consumers' Project of the Department of Labor, working together, are compiling a more comprehensive record for cooperatives.



SALISBURY:

You not only believe in making cooperative material available to the consumer but you are cooperating with other branches of the Government to get consumer education to the public.

MONTGOMERY:

We in the Consumers' Counsel are joining with the Consumers' Project, Department of Labor, in getting out other publications. One is a series of study outlines on such basic commodities as eggs, canned fruits and vegetables and meats. These are planned to aid consumer groups to conduct their own study courses on such things as quality and price and how to buy.

SALISBURY:

Are many consumer groups using them?

MONTGOMERY:

I'll have to tell you that at a later date. The study outlines have not been released as yet. When they are ready for distribution Consumers' Guide will tell about them. But since we are speaking about consumer information, I want to take this opportunity to speak about a publication of the Consumers' Project of the Department of Labor. - The Home Medicine Cabinet.

SALISBURY:

Oh, I have already seen that.

MONTGOMERY:

It's a splendid piece of work. Though we in Consumers' Counsel had nothing to do with the preparing of this booklet or publishing it we are vitally interested in publicising every bit of information that is helpful to the consumer. The Home Medicine Cabinet gives the consumer straight from the shoulder facts on what drugs and surgical equipment are most practical and essential in the home.

SALISBURY:

When I read it I was impressed by the mention it made of a study conducted by the Office of the Commissioner of Accounts of New York City on items in cabinets of approximately 10,000 New York families. The survey showed that the most popular antiseptic used by these families was a proprietary preparation which is a less effective germ-killer than many other antiseptics. The headache remedy most frequently found in the medicine cabinets investigated was a preparation containing acetanilid, a drug likely to cause ill effect when used indiscriminately.

MONTGOMERY:

The interesting thing to me about the publication is the concrete advice it gives to consumers in buying medicines. There is such a wide variation in drug prices in different stores and between the cost of different brands of the same product, that the buyer is often confused. Price, of course, means nothing unless related to quality. For normal purposes the Home Medicine Cabinet explains to Consumers that drugs which meet requirements specified in the U. S. Pharmacopoeia are pure. In buying a drug the consumer is safe so long as it is of U.S.P. quality. Therefore consumers can safely purchase such drug products as cheaply as possible. The Home Medicine Cabinet also gives the consumer tips on what antiseptics a family needs, what remedies may be used for burns, and



what pain remedies to avoid. It tells him how to select a toothbrush, a dentifrice, an inexpensive mouth wash, a hot water bottle, a thermometer.

SALISBURY:

The hazards involved in buying a thermometer were certainly news to me.

MONTGOMERY:

They are to most consumers but the Home Medicine Cabinet tells him in a most lucid way what to look for. I have the pamphlet with me and I should like to glean a few sentences from the passage on thermometers to read: "It is important in purchasing a thermometer to get one that is accurate. The consumer's most positive assurance of getting an accurate thermometer is to purchase one that has been tested by the National Bureau of Standards. Many thermometers are accompanied by certificates that from a casual glance, may lead the purchaser to believe that they have been tested by the National Bureau of Standards. Careful reading, however, discloses that this is not the meaning of the certificate. It states only that the standard used by the manufacturer has been checked by the National Bureau. A certificate which states that the thermometer was absolutely correct at three different readings should be looked upon with suspicion."...Well then the Medicine Cabinet goes on to tell the consumer what the reading of a correct thermometer should be and how one should test it after a period of time to make sure it is still accurate.

SALISBURY:

I wish there were more time to go into detail about the contents of the Home Medicine Cabinet, for it is chock full of valuable information such as giving a list of the necessary drugs and equipment every home should have.

MONTGOMERY:

It also tells the consumer the approximate cost of these drugs.

SALISBURY:

Well, you and I both have read the pamphlet, Mr. Montgomery, and consumers who are interested can procure one for their own use by writing to the Consumers' Project, the Department of Labor, Washington, D. C.